

The Pittsylvania Packet

Fall 2005

Number 58



Pittsylvania Historical Society

Chatham, Virginia

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Bus Tour to be held on September 10th, 2005

The Pittsylvania Historical Society is pleased to announce an early Autumn bus tour of Pittsylvania County sites. The tour will include visits to the following:

- ★ Giles Rock House west of Chatham
- ★ Col. William Ramsey's Graveyard
- ★ Col. William Ramsey's House
- ★ The Harmon-Cook House at Cooksburg
- ★ A rest stop at Camp Pitt
- ★ Little Cherrystone on Rt 57E east of Chatham
- ★ Lunch at Judy and Fuller Motley's restored cabin
- ★ Meadow Wood
- ★ The Dickinson-Barksdale House on Hickey's Road
- ★ Mustain-Whitehead-Berger House
- ★ Brown's Tavern
- ★ Yates Tavern

Many of these homes and buildings are very rarely open to the public for viewing. Little Cherrystone is in the midst of an exciting restoration; Yates Tavern was saved from rack and ruin by the Pittsylvania Historical Society (with help from many others) a few years ago.

The tour will depart from the old Kroger parking lot at the bottom of the hill below the post office on Main Street in Chatham at 9 AM sharp on September 10th. Tickets are \$25 each and include the cost of lunch. Contact Langhorne Jones at 434-432-9261 or Susan Worley at the *Star-Tribune* office to purchase tickets. A limited number of tickets are available, so get yours as soon as possible.

**Special Pittsylvania Historical Society
Membership Meeting
Monday Evening, September 19th, 2005
7:30pm**

John McLaughlin, Education Coordinator for the Douglas MacArthur Memorial and Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, will give a talk on the Medal of Honor and its history on September 19th at 7:30 PM.

The meeting will be held at Shadetree Rare Books, Main Street, Chatham, VA. All members are urged to attend this special event.

**Regular Pittsylvania Historical Society
Membership Meeting
Monday Evening, October 17th, 2005
7:30pm**

The regular membership meeting will be held on October 17th at 7:30 PM at the 1813 Clerk's Office behind Town Hall in Chatham. The new PHS President and other officers will be voted into office for the terms starting next year.

Plans are still being finalized for who will speak. Watch future issues of the *Star-Tribune* for more details.

Deadline for Submissions

Please submit any announcements, articles, etc. for the next issue of *The Pittsylvania Packet* by

December 1st, 2005. Queries and articles are always welcome!

**Callands Festival to be Held for the 25th year
on October 1st, 2005**

The acre of green surrounding the 18th century Clerk's Office at Callands will spring to life on Saturday, October 1st, when the Pittsylvania Historical Society stages the Callands Potpourri for the 25th year.

This festival, featuring arts, crafts, music, food, and much more, began in 1980 when James (Mack) Doss thought that the history that began there in 1767 had been ignored for much too long by those who were lucky enough to call Pittsylvania County home.

With the help of his long time mentor and friend, Frances Hallam Hurt, Doss organized the first festival in the fall of 1980. On that cold, blustery day in November (the festival's date was moved to the first weekend in October in subsequent years), a handful of demonstrations were held by the fireside of the Clerk's Office. Among the craftspeople were quilters, basket weavers, and needleworkers, all demonstrating how things were done in bygone days. A small pot of Brunswick Stew was provided by the Callands Fire Department.

Approximately 200 people patiently stood in line to catch a glimpse of the Clerk's Office, a little piece of Pittsylvania County history. Many people explained that this was their first opportunity to see the inside of the Clerk's Office, which, incidentally,

had been used for a while by the Oakes family for storage.

Now, twenty-five years later, the place is hopping the first Saturday in October with dozens of crafters and artisans located throughout the grounds plying their wares. To add to this setting, Doss has lined up individuals dressed in Colonial attire to demonstrate cider pressing, blacksmithing, apple butter making, basket weaving, and much more.

The sound of music from the foothills lilts through the air and brings some to their feet in an attempt to carry on the tradition of clogging. Real country folks still call this “flat footing”.

The large oaks behind the old Clerk’s Office provide shade and shelter for a Civil War Encampment and black powder demonstrations, while dozens stroll the historic grounds in Colonial costume, adding color to this fall event.

The smell of the coal blazing in the village blacksmith’s forge is hardly noticeable. Instead, festival goers are more tempted with the sights and smells from the nearby food court, teasing appetites with offerings of everything from funnel cakes to fried pies.

This event, organized to allow fellow Pittsylvanians and others to learn about Pittsylvania County’s 1767 “birth” from Halifax County, won national recognition in 2000, when the Library of Congress honored it by selecting this event as a Local Legacy to help celebrate the Library’s 200th birthday.

The Clerk’s Office, lovingly restored by the Chatham Garden Club for the county’s bicentennial

in 1967, was a gift from the Oakes family. The old Callands store, located on the other side of Sago Road, was a gift from the Stegall family. A war memorial rests on the grounds of the Clerk's Office to honor veterans from Pittsylvania County who served their country in the armed forces.

Parking and admission to the festival are free. The hours are from 10 AM to 4 PM. Both historic buildings are just off Route 57 at Callands on Sago Road. Don't worry about getting lost in this rural setting — just go past the miles of yard sales on Franklin Turnpike and follow the crowds. On this Saturday in October, if history is repeated and surely it will be, faithful friends of the festival will not be going anywhere else.

Gasoline and Other Prices of 1916 in Pittsylvania County

compiled by Sarah E. Mitchell

*The information in the following article came from late PHS president Preston Moses' article "1916 Issue of **Tribune** Brings Back Memories: Old **Tribune** Puts Blame for High Gasoline Price on Oil Companies," **Star-Tribune**, Vol. CXI, No. 2, Thursday, November 6th, 1980, Chatham, VA. Moses was reviewing an old copy of the **Pittsylvania Tribune** (a forerunner of the **Star-Tribune**) that had been given to the PHS.*

"A motorist has to be careful of his expenses if he owns an automobile He has to keep

enough money in the bank to cover his big gasoline bills caused by the oil companies.”

And the high price of gasoline that the writer was complaining about? 18 cents per gallon! (In 1980, the price was \$1.25 per gallon; in 2005, prices topped \$2.50 in the Pittsylvania County area.) Among the other prices and financial information listed:

A year’s subscription to the *Pittsylvania Tribune* was \$1 (wow, less than 2 cents per issue!). All Confederate veterans were eligible to receive a free subscription. (The paper reported that John Mosby, “great chief of the Beloved Confederacy,” had died at age 82, and that local Civil War veteran S. B. Davis, age 72, had died near Chatham. “One by one the Confederate soldiers cross over the river, but each is held in loving remembrance,” the paper sadly noted.)

Whitehead and Yeatts sold hammocks for \$1.50 to \$6.

Shepherd’s Department Store sold “men’s palm beach suits” for \$3 to \$12.

H. Viccellio & Bros. had two “used Deering binders” available for \$30 each.

Crowell Auto Company was selling touring cars for \$440.

R. Paul Sandford advertised that the Saxon touring roadster (\$395) “[h]as good pulling power and guaranteed 30 miles to a gallon.” [Not bad mileage!]

The Planter's Saving Bank was paying 4 percent interest. \$1 would open an account.

The Double Service Tire and Rubber Company was selling 100% puncture-proof auto tires for \$8.60 a piece and tubes for \$2.30.

A 1713 "Stradivorius" [Stradivarius] violin was for sale at the *Tribune* office — but the asking price was not listed.

Chatham Medicine Company sold a tonic or medicine that worked to relieve "rheumatism, eczema, catarrh, cuts, burns, stings, etc. Perfectly harmless [but did it actually *do* anything?]. . . price 25 cents a bottle . . ."

In political and law enforcement news, Woodrow Wilson, who was running for reelection against Teddy Roosevelt, promised to keep the United States out of World War I. Chatham's town council and mayoral elections were going to be held shortly, presumably on the same day as the Presidential elections. The Pittsylvania County Jail had only two prisoners in it.

Speaking of World War I, the paper reported on the fighting in Europe and the use of German Zepellins in the fighting. (Since newspapers were, in 1916, the primary source of news, more national and international news appeared in hometown papers. Preston Moses commented in 1980 that people could get their news from radio and television in addition to papers; today, people have yet more options with the Internet, satellite TV and radio, cable, etc.)

In social items, the Federation Club of

Chatham had a strawberry fête as a benefit for the library. A dance was held for the young people, “chaperoned by Mrs. Cochran and Mrs. T. S. Jones.” A group of young people had recently “motored” from Danville and had lunch on the “courthouse green.”

The Jno. P. Hunt store announced that they had a large refrigerator keeping cool “candies, cheese, butter, ginger ale, grape juice,” etc. Telephone service was available to some, and one of the car rental agencies (there were three) gave its twenty-four hour phone numbers.

Discovery at Beavers' Mill

Written by Robert (Bobby) Ricketts

Research by Danny Ricketts



Bobby and Danny Ricketts with portion of Mill
Wheel



Danny Ricketts Excavating



Bobby Ricketts with Mill Timber

The Beavers Family

There appears to have been no Beavers in Pittsylvania County before William Beavers married Nancy McDaniel here on February 8, 1790. Nancy was the daughter of Anne McDaniel, widow of Capt. William McDaniel of Halifax County. Capt. McDaniel owned 482 acres on Sandy Creek in Pittsylvania County when he died in 1778. Anne moved her family here just after the Revolutionary War.

On August 5, 1792 William Beavers bought a 285 acre tract adjoining his mother-in-law's land on Sandy Creek. Also in 1792, Anne McDaniel proposed to build a water-powered grist mill on her land on Sandy Creek. On September 29, 1792 a jury met to view the land and approved her request. It is likely that William Beavers oversaw the construction of the new mill in 1792. This was to be recorded 20 years later, in 1812, in a court document approving an application for William Beavers to rebuild the mill "formerly built by him".

Discovery of Mill in 2003

On Christmas Day 2003 my dad, Danny Ricketts, and I ventured out in the cold to Beavers Mill Road, where it crosses the Sandy Creek. Dad had been doing research on the Beavers family and wanted to show me the original wooden sill of the dam from Beavers' Mill.

While viewing the wooden sill, Dad was confused over why there were no remnants from the grist mill; not even a foundation. He said the mill was known to have been located upstream from where the road crosses the creek. With that in mind,

I remembered that Dad had told me years earlier that most roads descending on a creek were curvy and most had been moved in the last century in order to straighten them. Therefore, a new bridge would have been constructed, usually in a different location.

I walked downstream a bit to see if I could find the old bridge abutments. Before I could find the abutments, I saw another wooden sill and dam timbers beneath the water of the creek. I yelled to Dad and he ran down to see my discovery. We jumped down to the creek to see the timbers better. While in the creek, Dad noticed a rounded piece of wood protruding from the creek bank. After a better look it was clear that this was a piece from the mill's wooden water wheel.

Who Owned the Land?

Dad was determined to find the present-day owner of the land to get permission to excavate the wheel section. A few days later he was in the Chatham Courthouse digging through the records to find the owner. After searching for a while, Dad was unable to find the owner in the records because the land had changed hands so many times since 1792. Before leaving the courthouse, Christy Hicks (an area novelist), who was doing some research in the courthouse, asked Dad what he had been looking for. Dad explained to her what he was trying to find and Christy said, "I own the land!" Also interested in Pittsylvania County history, Christy was eager to find out what was left behind on her land, so she gave us permission to begin excavation.

With the assistance of the Danville Science Center, Dad obtained the go-ahead from state

archeological officials to begin excavation of the site, with the understanding that we would document all finds. At this point, it seemed like we were destined to discover this mill site.

Excavation of the Wooden Water Wheel

In the spring of 2004, my dad and I, along with my 14-year-old son Joey, began the excavation. We expected to have the wheel section fully excavated by the end of the day, but we were in for a surprise.

There was at least 8 feet of sand, clay, and dirt on top of the water wheel and when we reached the width of four feet on the wheel and found it continued wider, we knew we needed help.

A few weeks later we returned with several volunteers and resumed excavation. After several weekends of digging we finally removed the entire water wheel from its resting place of over 200 years. The wheel measured 16 feet in width and was once eight feet in diameter! The mill burned soon after it was built in 1792. Only the lower port of the water wheel survived, and we found a substantial amount of it. During our excavation we removed several tons of clay, sand, and dirt from the site and discovered remnants of two mills on top of the water wheel. This is consistent with records which show two mills being built on this site after the first mill burned.

Although we do not know the exact year the mill burned after it was built in 1792, we do know that the water wheel was not used for very long, which leads us to believe that it must have burned only a couple of years after being built.

Contemporary expert opinion of this period states that wooden water wheels exposed to daily use and air rarely lasted over eight years without extensive repairs. This water wheel has no signs of rot or deterioration on the parts that were preserved in the clay, which shows that it was not in use very long. The roman numerals carved into the sections by the builder are very clear to this day!

Also excavated were several large timbers from the mill which were also preserved in the clay with the water wheel. Very little above this level of clay had survived. On the bedrock, beneath the water wheel and timbers, we found hundreds of iron artifacts. The most important find, besides the water wheel, was the original blacksmith forged iron driver. This driver was inserted into the upper millstone and the spindle, which was an iron rod turned by the gears leading from the water wheel, was inserted into it. The iron driver is two pieces of iron "welded" together by a blacksmith and weighs 11½ pounds. Also found were a section of iron gearing, hundreds of nails, bolts, nuts, pocketknife, scale weight, a brass heel to a woman's shoe, and many items that are unidentified.

Dad spoke to Herman Melton, who most people know as the author of two books on grist mills in Pittsylvania County (as well as numerous other books, monographs, and articles). Melton said that he believes that this may be the oldest wooden water wheel in existence in America.

Future of the Water Wheel and Artifacts

Dad, my son Joey, and I were invited to a meeting with Dr. James Kelly, Director of

Collections for the Virginia Historical Society Museum in Richmond. Charles F. Bryan, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer of the museum had seen my website about the water wheel and had Dr. Kelly contact me. Our meeting was in January 2005 and following our presentation of our finds we were treated to a four-hour tour of the museum. We were very impressed on how the museum was operated.

Dr. Kelly showed us the new \$16 million addition that will be completed in 2006. The new addition will be titled "Virginians at Work". It will be an extension of the current "History of Virginia" exhibit. Dr. Kelly wants our water wheel and artifacts to be the focal point of the new addition. The new exhibit will open in June 2006.

We have agreed to donate the water wheel, mill timbers, and artifacts to the museum for the "Virginians at Work" exhibit. We are excited about such a large collection from Pittsylvania County being a "focal point" in Richmond.

I have a website with many pictures of the excavation, the water wheel, mill timbers, and most of the artifacts. It also has much more about the history of the Beavers family. The website address is www.beaversmill.com.

A Vignette on John William Compton, Civil War Soldier

John William Compton's service record is skimpy in details, but shows he enlisted March 10, 1862 in Pittsylvania County; was mustered into

service by Lt. David V. Dickinson; and was assigned to Company D (“Galveston Tigers”) of the 57th Virginia Infantry Regiment. He served with his regiment to the end of the Civil War and was paroled at Appomattox. He was reportedly the champion wrestler in Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. He lived out his life on his farm east of Gretna. He died May 16, 1927, and is buried on the homeplace.

- adapted from “Picture of the Past,” *Star-Tribune*, Vol. CXI, No. 2, Thursday, November 6, 1980.

Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

The Historical Society books are currently available for purchase from the following retailers. Suggested retail prices do not include shipping, handling, or tax.

Chatham Books, 10 North Main Street, P. O. Box 71,
Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-2488,
chathambooks@gamewood.net

Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History, 975 Main
Street, Danville, VA 24541, 434-793-5644

Mitchells Publications, P. O. Box 429, Chatham, VA
24531, 434-432-0595, 1-800-967-2867,
answers@foodhistory.com,
<http://www.MitchellsPublications.com>

News and Novels, 3282 Riverside Drive, Danville, VA
24541, 434-793-3407

Shadetree Rare Books, P. O. Box 994, Chatham
Antique Gallery, Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-1400,
hhurt@adelphia.net,
<http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com>

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Maud Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County*
(Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Madelene Fitzgerald, *Pittsylvania Homes and History of the Past* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$18.

Roger Dodson, *Footprints from the Old Survey Books*
(Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Softcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Gray's *Map of Chatham, Virginia 1878* (Frameable Map)
Suggested Retail Price: \$3.

Frances Hallam Hurt, *An Intimate History of the American Revolution in Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Hardcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$15.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania County's Historic Courthouse: The Story Behind Ex Parte Virginia and the Making of a National Landmark* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Eighteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Nineteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes Well Laid On: Crime and Punishment in Southside Virginia 1750—1950*
(Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Judge Langhorne Jones, *Tales from a Small Town*
(Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$5.